

Consensus

Volume 15

Issue 1 *Mission of the Church*

Article 13

5-1-1989

The Living Voice of the Gospel

Erwin Buck

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus>

Recommended Citation

Buck, Erwin (1989) "The Living Voice of the Gospel," *Consensus*: Vol. 15 : Iss. 1 , Article 13.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol15/iss1/13>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by Scholars Commons @ Laurier. It has been accepted for inclusion in Consensus by an authorized editor of Scholars Commons @ Laurier. For more information, please contact scholarscommons@wlu.ca.

approaches can be seen in their entries on the Pentateuch and its sources. *Eerdmans* gives as much space to the traditional view that Moses was responsible for the Pentateuch as to the Documentary Hypothesis of modern scholars, even though concluding that the historical-critical approach is important for understanding the sources for the Pentateuch. *Harper's* discusses only the Documentary Hypothesis.

In conclusion, I can say that I am happy to possess both dictionaries. For its comprehensiveness, wider range of theological interpretation, and greater attention to linguistic details I find *Eerdmans* a valuable resource. For its more pleasing format (larger print, more pictures, maps, and charts), wider range of authors, and more up-to-date biblical criticism I value *Harper's*. A further plus for *Harper's* is the newly published (1988) companion volume, *Harper's Bible Commentary*, with its extensive cross-references to the dictionary.

David W. Dahle

Camrose Lutheran College, Camrose, Alberta

The Living Voice of the Gospel

Francis J. Moloney

New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1986

U.S. \$8.95

Francis Moloney wishes to bring to laypeople the insights that have been gained by careful and responsible scholarship. The growing sophistication of believers, especially among the young, suggests to him that the time is ripe for scholars to communicate with laypersons on a more challenging level.

After a general introduction regarding the appropriate reading of a gospel the author devotes two chapters to each of the four gospels, outlining first the general argument and the major theological issues found within the gospel under consideration, and then examining a particular section from that gospel. In the concluding chapter Moloney reflects on the dynamism that has always characterized the revelation of the Word of God in Scriptures and in the Tradition.

Moloney presents data which demonstrate that the gospels are at variance with one another at significant points. "There are *two very different* versions of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth" (93), he observes, and the gospels often diverge widely in the way in which they portray such incidents as Peter's confession of faith, for instance. Careful comparison of the Matthean Sermon on the Mount with the corresponding material in Luke, leads Moloney to conclude: "If we claim that the gospels are historical, in the modern sense of the term, then either Luke or Matthew must have their

'facts' wrong" (9). The gospels are not primarily brief accounts of the life of Jesus. Each evangelist has told the basic story of Jesus in such a way as to proclaim, in his own particular way, a message of God's purpose in offering hope and salvation for humankind. Therefore, "we must avoid the temptation to harmonise them, to insist that all four evangelists are saying the same thing" (19).

The gospels should be read as entire documents, not just as collections of independent stories. "It is not by chance that the miracle of the Syrophoenician woman [in Mark] comes between a gift of bread to Israel (6:31-44) and a gift of bread to the Gentiles (8:1-10)" (33). The confession of Peter is carefully "framed" by two miracles where blind men receive sight (Mark 8:22-26; 10:46-52) and is dominated by three passion predictions (8:31; 9:31; 10:32-34). It is the contextual placing of the individual stories which gives important clues regarding the evangelist's intended meaning.

But the interpreter must not be content simply to elucidate the background and intention of the evangelist, Moloney insists. The object is not "the rediscovery of a first-century church with its first-century answers" (20). The gospels have something to say to women and men today. Mark assures the readers that even though they continue to see things "in the way of men" (8:33), Jesus does not abandon them, but continues to teach them in the way of discipleship, not by laying down laws, but by inviting them to "follow" the way of the suffering and serving Son of Man. Mark calls a suffering church to follow a suffering Messiah. Luke proclaims a universal message of repentance and salvation to churches far-flung from Christianity's Jewish origins. The theme of "journey" permeates all of Luke, the unborn baby must be carried all the way from Galilee to Jerusalem (see Luke 2:1-7 and compare Matthew 2:1-12, which presupposes that the baby is born at home). At Jerusalem, one journey ends and another begins, as the church launches out into the whole world, as Luke relates in Acts. Matthew points to Jesus as the perfection of the hopes of Israel. John proclaims the unique revelation of God in his only-begotten Son Jesus, before whom both Jew and Greek must make their decision of faith.

The book does not constitute an advance in New Testament scholarship. Rather, Moloney has admirably succeeded in presenting in concise fashion for the benefit of the intelligent and interested layperson what scholars have come to observe a long time ago.

Realizing that the discussion of these issues often generates great heat—and very little light, Moloney has "tried to deal with this matter in an objective and caring way" (x). While endeavouring to keep in touch with contemporary scholarship, Moloney has attempted to write in a direct and simple fashion, "trying to avoid all the byways into which a purely scholarly approach could lead us" (viii). He deliberately takes a "moderate line" (147), but unfortunately he frequently skirts the real problems which are created by scholarly observations. "We cannot pause here to delve into the theological and historical difficulties created by these two very different narratives," he remarks after comparing the birth stories of Matthew and

Luke (93). For such treatments Moloney refers the reader to bibliography in the footnotes.

At various places one might disagree with Moloney. For example, does the Lukan Eucharist indeed center around "a body broken and blood spilt" (85)? It all depends on how one copes with the text- critical problem at Luke 22:17 ff., but Moloney does not even indicate that there is such a problem. With regard to Matthew, Moloney accepts the structural outline of Bacon, without mentioning J.D. Kingsbury's trenchant critique of that analysis.

Nevertheless, this is an eminently useful book for the intelligent layperson who wishes to learn more about a responsible handling of Scripture.

Erwin Buck

Lutheran Theological Seminary

On Exodus: a Liberating Perspective

George V. Pixley

translated by Robert R. Barr

Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987

xx + 236 pp.

For many years the writer of this review has believed and taught that Yahweh's message to the Egyptian Pharaoh, "Let my people go", is a one-sentence summary of Old Testament theology. A commentary on Exodus dedicated to "the heroic struggle of the Salvadoran people" and addressed to "the person who feels an identification with the oppressed in their longing for liberation" (xv) would seem, on the surface at least, to fall directly within this perspective.

Through a section-by-section analysis of the entire book of Exodus, augmented by thirteen appendices, George V. Pixley draws on the results of biblical scholarship to make the case that "there is an affinity between the struggle of the Hebrew people against the forced labor and genocide imposed by the Egyptian state and the current struggles of the popular classes in such places as Central America" (xiv). As the commentary develops it becomes clear that more is at stake than this modest aim indicates. The book of Exodus appears as a justification of and a formula for revolution against the oppressor.

The possibility of this radical interpretation of the book lies in the author's isolation of four stages in the composition of the text. These correspond to changes in the social and political contexts of the writers. In the initial two stages, now obscured and almost obliterated by later reinterpretation, the Exodus narrative is an account of a class struggle. Originally, it was the battle for liberty of an oppressed peasant group in